

A MOTHER SPEAKS FOR AMNESTY

Four years ago in Vietnam my 25 year old son Michael Mullen, was killed - by our own artillery. In military terminology, he was a "non-battle casualty" of "friendly fire" in a "misadventure." With this in mind, it may seem strange that I support amnesty for those who refused, in one way or another, to fight in Vietnam. But I do.

We are an ordinary Iowa farm family, and I am without political experience, so I speak plainly. I know and accept what some politicians are still unwilling to admit - that the war which took my son was a senseless, terrible, tragic blunder. That blunder is now being compounded by punishing further those young men who were wise and brave enough not to be deluded by the war from the beginning.

Like the shelling which killed my son, the Vietnam war was itself a "misadventure." Only those who lost sons, brothers, or husbands in it can really understand the depth of my anguish and bitterness. How I would like to believe that my son's life was not wasted - that he died for some high ideal! Amnesty for others would provide a little comfort.

If some members of Congress - and the President - insist on misinterpreting amnesty as pardon, then the question may remain too emotionally charged ever to be resolved. Amnesty, in the original Greek, meant forgetfulness. Pardon implies guilt. I would no more expect a young man who refused to kill in Vietnam - whose moral or spiritual opposition to the war left him no alternative but to leave the country - to admit he was guilty of a crime than I would expect Congress, which allowed the war to endure for so long at so great a cost, to admit it, too, was guilty.

What we need is not blame, but forgetfulness. Forget the inequities of the draft. Forget the lies told by Presidents, the generals, the spokesmen for the State Department and the Pentagon. Forget the moral and philosophical dilemmas posed by Vietnam. Instead, let us remember that the American people have suffered enough and that some of us want our children home.

It is hard to believe anymore in the old maxim: "My country, right or wrong." Instead, if our country is wrong, we have an obligation as citizens to correct the wrong. Who is the more loyal citizen, the one who agonizes over his nation's policies and attempts to change them or the one who docilely accepts government policy - no matter how immoral or misguided? If it is the former, then we cannot possibly continue to punish those young Americans whose unwillingness to take part in the war was based on a higher sense of allegiance and responsibility to America's ideals. If, however, the mark of good citizenship is docile submission to government policy, then those who fled the country were indeed wrong. By the same token, so were the judgements at Nuremburg - the Germans who followed orders should not have been punished.

In 1964 we the American people elected a President who spoke out against escalation but actually widened the war. That election occurred six years before my son's death. If, as some believe, young men who refused to serve in Vietnam abandoned America in her time of need, what of Congress during those six years? By allowing the war to escalate and go on and on, did it not abandon us in our time of need?

What difference is there between a government which forces its dissidents to seek exile and a government which exiles its dissidents?

Today, Canada, Sweden and other countries in Europe have taken in many young American Solzhenitzyns.

If I am to believe that my son sacrificed his life for a high ideal - if I am to receive some comfort from his death - I want to believe that he died so that some other mother's son might now come home.

DON'T YOU THINK IT'S TIME FOR A CHANGE?

VOTE YES

ON QUESTION

Peg

Mullen

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NOVEMBER 5, 1974

"Shall the Senator from this district be instructed to vote to approve a resolution memorializing the Congress of the United States in favor of Amnesty for all those who resisted the Vietnam War?"

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The pamphlet were provided by friends of Harvard-Radcliffe Students for Amnesty

